

and make one soul the seat by cantilatrix

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Summary: Steve Harrington has a huge house, and his parents are never home. Which was great, once.

and make one soul the seat

And after all of it, life goes on.

He's surprised, to be honest. He's had time to get used to the strangeness of secret-keeping— of walking down the street, staring at how oblivious everyone is, and trying not to scream at them. But this is different. This is the *mall*. He'd have thought that even if nobody took notice of Will or Barb or the labs or the *monsters*, at least they'd notice the *mall*?

Or the military that swoop down upon them, wrap them in foil blankets and drive them home in Humvees? The military that crawl across Hawkins for a week, in the mall and the abandoned lab and so many places in town that Dustin *freaks out* and forces Steve to keep a walkie with him at all times just in case they try and take El? That, at least?

Nope. It's all swept up neatly into a single headline and a freak accident. Thirty-three people die in a fire, like people ought to, rather than forming the flesh that forms a creature that still haunts him in his nightmares. And life goes on.

He's deposited at his front door covered in blood and sick and other things he'd rather not think about, and the house is empty. His parents are out of town, still. It's another conference, this time his mom's, some two week thing. He wonders if someone called them, but they don't come home the next day, or the day after, and he doesn't bother to check if they don't know or just don't care. The blood washes off, and the black eye heals. Eventually, Robin comes over, and they light a fire in his yard and burn the Scoops Ahoy uniform. The only true casualties of the Hawkins mall fire are some cheap polyester sailor outfits. Robin wonders aloud who set the fake fire, and whether they placed fake bodies in it, and whether Scoops Ahoy met its deserving end. Steve tells her to change the subject.

Robin had brought marshmallows, absurdly. They make s'mores over the plasticky uniform fire. It's a far cry from what he used to do when his parents were out of town, but he doesn't mind.

He tries not to look over at the pool. Even though it's covered over, it still makes him antsy.

Robin has a surname, he finds out. 'Buckley' was a name he'd totally ignored in class, and he's only now catching up. He's glad to have the chance. Robin kicks at some of the gooey black plastic sinking into his mom's lawn and demands he tell her everything, and he does.

He tells her of the night he went to make up with his girlfriend and came face-to-face with a monster instead. He tells her all about Dustin's dog, and the tunnels caked with spores, and the Hawkins lab, and he tells her about El.

"I don't get that," she says.

"What's not to get?"

"The whole 'moving things with her mind' thing."

Steve looks up from where he's been ripping an uncooked marshmallow into smaller and smaller pieces. "You saw her cream three guys with a mall display car."

"I'm not saying I don't believe it," Robin says, as if he's stupid. "I'm *saying*, why do we have a town full of monsters *and* a town with a girl who can move stuff with her mind?"

"What does it matter?" Steve says.

"It matters," Robin says, but she doesn't seem to know why, because instead of arguing the point she just skewers another marshmallow and puts the stick into the fire.

Steve shows her the baseball bat, later. He's not sure why he does, but it feels right. He hides it under the loose floorboard in his bedroom, and it still has small pieces of flesh stuck to it he's never had the balls to clean off. Robin wrinkles up her nose at it, and then the next day comes over with her huge hardshell cello case, a brand new baseball bat, and a favour to ask. Together, they hammer in nails, and she hides it in the case and goes home again. The house is emptier without her. He watches reruns of *Dynasty* in the day, and at night he dreams of fireworks bouncing on molten flesh. He dreams of

neon, and ice cream, and the sweat that had clung to his sailor outfit. The scent of artificial strawberry and blood. He dreams of a needle in his neck, and a swimming ceiling, and a man driving a fist into his stomach for hours. He dreams of a demogorgon wrapping its face around his, teeth scraping at his scalp, and he wakes with a scream and scrambles across his floorboards in the dark.

His mom calls, a couple days later. Tells him her and Dad are going to make two trips into one to save on plane tickets, go straight from the Denver conference to the San Francisco talk instead of coming back in the middle.

"Sure," he says, plays up sounding chipper so he doesn't sound like a whiny kid who wants his mom to come home. He grew out of that a long time ago. She picks up on the tone.

"Don't take this as an excuse to host anything in the house," she says. Steve fiddles with the calendar on the wall with one hand as he grips the receiver tight with another.

"I won't, mom," he says. "Nobody does house parties anymore." Not that he'd know. Everybody went to college. The calendar hasn't been turned; it's still stuck on June. He can't not ask. "Hey, mom? Did you hear about the mall?"

"Oh, yes," she says. "That sounded terrible. Did you know anyone who died?"

He doesn't want to talk about that.

"No," he says.

A murmur from the distance, over the tinny phone. His dad. He hopes he doesn't want to talk too.

"I have to go," Mom says, and he clutches the receiver in both hands, knocking the calendar from the wall as he does. Is she not going to ask if he's okay? *She's not even gonna ask?*

"Okay, Mom," he says.

"Be good." And then the dial tone bores into his skull. He hangs up.

He feels an emptiness carve slowly into him, the kind that he used to paper over with stealing from dad's liquor cabinet and getting Tommy to swipe him cigarettes and hosting loud, loud parties where he could have some goddamn fun for once. If that wouldn't work, he could climb through Nancy's window and bother her about her teddy bears and her homework until she would make out with him.

He wonders about the conversation all night, blandly watching The Tonight Show. His parents are busy, sure, but they're not *psychos*. He realises, after a few hours, that it makes so much more sense if they just *hadn't remembered he worked at the mall to begin with*.

He doesn't have Tommy, or Carol, or Nicole. He doesn't have Nancy. But he knows where his dad's started to hide the liquor. He pours whiskey into a huge mug and waters the rest down in the hopes dad won't notice, and he regrets how much whiskey he's poured about halfway through drinking it, but it makes the world go fuzzy around the edges and it's hard to feel so awful when he's instead focusing on making his way across the spinning floor to his bed.

He throws up in his wastepaper basket the next morning, and has to wash the chunks out of his hair and brush his teeth, and he hates himself.

He rings Robin's doorbell in the afternoon, after he's slept it off. Her mother shows up at the door and is beside herself to have him there, to his surprise; most girls' moms hated him. She calls upstairs to Robin and expresses her excitement to have a boy come calling for her girl, and *oh, okay*. He feels awkward. Robin comes downstairs looking as terrible as he feels. Her hair is stringy like she hasn't washed it in days and she's wearing pyjama pants at four in the afternoon. Her mother clucks her tongue and Steve stands up as if he's about to leap between them. He has to take a breath before he speaks.

"Wanna come over?" he says. Robin nods like she's been waiting to be asked. Her mom goes up with her, maybe to warn her of some kind of curfew, but when she comes down twenty minutes later she's washed and dressed and has a sports bag slung over her shoulder, like she doesn't intend to come back any time soon. They walk back to his house together and they sit quietly in his quiet house, and

Robin stares resolutely into empty space. Steve's not sure why she's come until she leans forward, forearms resting on her legs, and talks, quietly, to the wall ahead of her.

"I went up to, uh, Tippecanoe the other day."

"Yeah?" he says, shifting awkwardly on the couch.

"Yeah. Visiting family, you know. Totally awful."

"Mm. Oh yeah. Always a drag."

"But, uh, as we drove through town, I couldn't stop thinking. It's like, what, ten people that know about all of-" she gestures, wheeling her hands around the room. "-This? If Tippecanoe had their own, their own *monsters*, and girls who can move cars with their minds, which by the way is still weird, it's like totally unrelated to the monster thing and I'm still weirded out that both things are just *happening* at the same time— but if it happened in Tippecanoe too, how the hell would we know?"

Something in that thought makes Steve feel horribly small. Robin tilts her head down until her hair falls in curtains and hides her face.

"What if they're everywhere, and it all gets hidden, all over the world?"

Steve's not sure what to say. He does what he always does; he lets his head pick the first easy reply.

"Then all the other secret-keepers must be doing something right," he says with a shrug. "Demogorgons haven't eaten Reagan or Carson or anything, so. We're doing okay, I think."

Robin laughs and he can hear the way it's muffled by tears. "Thanks, dingus."

"It's what friends are for," he says. She tilts her head sideways, and he can see her eyes are wet and her nose is running in a way that's kind of gross. He hugs her anyway, and she hugs him back.

He's not sure what to say after that, so he says something stupid

instead.

"Farrah Fawcett or Lynda Carter."

She pulls back to look at him, frowning.

"What?"

Steve grins.

"You heard me. And there is a right answer."

She scoffs but her eyes are bright and fond.

"Well. We both know who you'd pick."

"You *stink* of Farrah Fawcett, Harrington."

He jerks back abruptly, quelling the urge to smooth his hair back, and she laughs at him. "What? You don't think anyone living in the 20th Century doesn't know what that hairspray smells like?"

But her laugh isn't mocking, it's gentle and warm, so he laughs too and pushes her back a little. "You're a smelling pyscho," Steve complains. "You could always smell peoples' shampoo across the counter."

"Not my fault your nose is dead," she crows. "Maybe if you cut back on the *copious* Farrah Fawcett hairspray-"

Steve grins, jumps off the couch and rushes for the stairs. By the time she's getting worried enough to call up, he's armed himself and he's taking the stairs down two at a time. She realises what he's doing when she's too close to stop him, and turns tail to run when her hair has already been blasted.

"Stop!" she laughs breathlessly. "You're gonna fumigate me, asshole."

By the time they stop she's laughing too hard to speak and he's doubled over laughing at how her hair is sticking in every angle, and the whole house smells of Farrah Fawcett hairspray.

"Faberge Organics," she manages to gasp out once she's regained her breath, sprawled laughing on the floor, and he collapses down with her, and everything feels forgotten.

She's brought cassettes with her, and she plays him Tears for Fears on his until he knows every word. He tries to comb her hair into his style, 'though her hair's so crunchy from all the hairspray it refuses to go anywhere but up. When it gets dark, he tells her, in hushed guilty tones, about Barb, and the pool, and she sits there quietly a moment, and then demands they go in. It takes an hour to heat, and it takes an hour longer for him to get up the courage to follow her. He hadn't entered the pool in three years, and at night, it is as bottomless as the sea. She looks scared too, but when she splashes his hair, she laughs at his face, and then dunks her hair under, scrubbing at it until the hairspray is almost gone, and when she finally emerges again he can take a breath, and he does, and laughs.

They emerge and she dries off in the guest bedroom, and he asks her when her parents want her back, and she shrugs and says 'not yet'. She finally gives him an answer to his question— *Lynda Carter, of course, Wonder Woman is so hot*— and with the dam broken, they argue about as many actresses as they can name. Robin rushes out every opinion like she's never gotten to say it before. Steve wonders if she ever has. He asks her to play Tears for Fears again, and he belts out 'Everybody Wants to Rule The World' in his finest Kermit until Robin begs him through laughter and tears to stop. She tells him, as the night turns to morning, about every girl in school she's ever had a crush on, and she says every one in a hushed whisper, eyes flickering to the window like she might see someone there. He draws the curtains as the sun rises.

Talk turns, as sleep comes closer, to the end of Starcourt. To Russians and to monsters. Robin asks him about the demogorgon as they lie on the bed of the guest bedroom, among the ridiculous number of throw pillows his mom keeps on there.

"Did it look like—" she gestures vaguely in a way that does little to describe. "—that?"

"No," he says. "It was smaller, way smaller. Like a really tall man." He thinks of its head opening like flower petals. "...But, uh. It was

worse."

He can't find an explanation that'll get close to the memory. He's not a words kind of guy. He blinks up at the ceiling.

Somehow, when he thinks on it now, it feels smaller. Like he's grown up, and the memory is further away.

He turns his head to look at Robin, and her eyes have fluttered shut. Her head is nestled into a whole wall of throw pillows. Her breathing is slow and quiet.

He considers going to his own bedroom, but it feels an eternity away now his limbs are heavy. He lets himself relax, and when he wakes he finds he has not dreamt.

He comes downstairs to find that Robin can't cook for shit, and has burnt eggs to his mom's frying pan, but she has made toast, and when she offers him some of it, burnt though it also is, he eats it gratefully. She's playing cassettes again, on his dad's player, like she owns the place. He mocks her cooking abilities through a mouthful, and she offers to take it from him and throw it in the garbage disposal. He laughs, and he finds he had, for a moment, forgotten it all.

He asks her if she's started looking for a job again.

And life goes on.

Title from Henry David Thoreau's 'Friendship', and that part's only the title because this part is too long to be.

Two sturdy oaks I mean, which side by side,

Withstand the winter's storm,

And spite of wind and tide,

Grow up the meadow's pride,

For both are strong

Above they barely touch, but undermined

Down to their deepest source,

Admiring you shall find

Their roots are intertwined

Inseparably.

I'm not a huge Stranger Things fan, but I am a huge Steve Harrington fan, and after this season pretty much the only storyline I care about in this WORLD is him and Robin. As such, I needed to write this and get it out of my system, but like I said, I'm not a big Stranger Things fan, so I've almost certainly gotten things wrong and/or written them weird, I apologise!

(I have a thought about a Family Video chapter with Dustin and Erica and Keith, though, so if you want that, let me know!)

Hope you all enjoyed!